

296 and crushed, potash--containing saponaria seed called "endod" (*Phytolacca abyssinica*) which grows wild, but the locations of which are carefully remembered for "harvest". The crushed seed is mixed with cold water on the slightly concave top of a rock, or in a cowskin. The cloth is kneaded, stamped on with feet, until a good foam develops. This is done several times; then the garment is rinsed, and bleached by the sun. In time the cloth does become grayish, particularly the peasant trousers which are used more than the festive shirt and jodphurs, but the native soap-plant is kinder to the material than the coarse European laundry soap now available at big markets.

291 There is little basic difference between the garments worn by the sexes. Jodphurs may be worn by traveling ladies of feudal lords, since there is no side-saddle, but the peasant woman never wears trousers. Also, instead of the shirt, women generally wear a long loose heavy cotton gown from shoulder to feet, though formerly the peasant women used to leave the upper body bare, as a symbol of "respect" (as peasant males used to do on most occasions), and for comfort. Above the tied waist, this garment is still loose, and two-year old infants not yet weaned can walk up to their seated mothers and help themselves to nourishment and comfort by simply pulling the unobstructed breast out. Women wear the toga just as men do, but drape it differently on certain occasions.

● [853]

The old type of trousers, wide at the hips and tapering to leg size just below the knee ("bat tāhulāt") has survived the introduction of white jodphurs ("surri") only

✓

551 "Metekē" - (lit. my substitute), e. g. if the mother had lost a previous baby, especially of the same (male) sex.

"Seyum" - (lit. the one appointed to dignity), e.g. if the mother has ambitions for the boy. Common among nobles.

"Ḍesta" - (lit. joy).

Girls

"Almas" - (lit. diamond)

"Manān" - (lit. excellent, exquisite, magnificent). Common to nobles.

"Tsādal" - (lit. splendor, luster). From the Gees language.

Baptismal names, described earlier, are given by the confessor, sometimes based on the name of a deceased ancestor - especially among nobility - but are not usually used in later life unless or until the person marries by "qurban" ecclesiastical marriage, or becomes a monk or nun. Typical baptismal names are (for boys):

"Gabrā-Māsa" - (lit. Servant of the Cross)

"Gabrā-Egziabher" - (lit. Servant of God).

D. The long, happy nursing stage.

254

Despite the many physical ailments that endanger the life of a baby in this materially undeveloped country, the nursing stage is one in which it receives more care than at any later period.

● [853] The long, 2-year breastfeeding, for both boys and girls, gives them some resistance to the effects of malnutrition, vitamin shortage, diarrhea, and infections of all kinds from which older children suffer. The nursing is never out of touch with the body of the mother, or other woman or older sister. Most of the time the baby

854 is carried about on its mother's back, riding spread-legged in a half-sack. Other women and older sisters are about, eager to cuddle and handle the baby ("dallāla") to console, comfort, caress). In doing this they bend down to the baby, or pick it up, but rarely grasp it to kiss it. Fathers rarely fondle the baby until it is weaned. They often have to take a special count when asked how many teeth the baby has.

The term for nurling, "gelgal", may be extended to animal nurlings as a compliment, but not vice versa, for this would be an insult. When the baby can sit or stand, mothers hold it by the hands and coo babytalk to it, e.g. "tatu sagra" (lit. - footsie), encouraging it to take first steps, or warning it not to touch a

853 dangerous thing, such as fire, by designating it as "kaka". The baby learns to walk during the second year, long before it is weaned. Thus a baby with a nearly full set of teeth can be seen walking up to its mother, groping for the breast inside the dress or toga, pulling it out, and beginning to take nourishment while squeezing a side of the breast with the full hand. The mother will rarely push it away, until it has had its fill and lingers dreamily, and she has other work to do. In this case the mother may push the baby away gently, without sign of annoyance. Inside the hut, women are not bashful about their breasts being partly ex-

854 posed during feeding, but in sight of a stranger they may cover the process of the baby's taking nourishment for fear of evil-eye spirits to which every eater is vulnerable and which might dry up the milk (out of envy and meanness).

803 Toilet training begins gradually after weaning, i.e. after the age of two, when the mother has resumed full wifely duties and

X 794 realizing that her "zar" had insulted the powerful one of Salantew.
796
[689] Back on her throne, Lady Salantew harshly admonishes the audience for
dozing, for whispering, for laughing, and some for having taken food
and drink during the previous "gurri". This inattentiveness is an in-
sult to her zar, and she threatens to recess the convention if it
continues. But then she sugarcoats the threat by calling for another
round of refreshments.

[853] Some of the babies in the rear had cried, and were nursed by
their mothers. This had also been done by some of the possessed
women previously, sometimes within half an hour after the exhausting
"gurri". Motherhood and zar devotion evidently did not conflict.

[123] Lady Salantu used this intermission to send the foreigner word
promising "I shall appoint you a zar as your weqabi (protective
spirit)". When she saw that he had drunk some of the barley beer
which she had ordered to be served on the tablet of her zar. This
time she addressed him in the female gender again, just as she had
used a male gender in addressing her female devotees. The zars
are believed to enjoy playing their game of turning nature upside
down.

X 794 About 1A.M., everyone rose, except the poet and the drummer.
535
796 Fresh incense was heaped on the burners. Tired and partly intoxi-
cated members of the audience were shaken awake. For now they
were to witness the "fukkara", the individualistic "boasting dance"
of Lady Salantew's zar. It was a spastic bobbing up-and-down dance,
similar to the "hotu" dance of warriors. The drum beat faster and
[293] faster, Lady Salantew seemed to forget her dignity, but still waved
her strap, the symbol of her seniority, while the devotees shouted

854 until weaning, at the

[853] age of two, the child is never removed from contact with the body of the mother or other female relative caring for him. After weaning, childhood is an age of roaming over the countryside during the long dry season and of performing such useful tasks as protecting the harvest by shooting pebbles from slingshots at birds and baboons.

855 The pattern of punishment is dominated by spontaneity, during childhood as well as adolescence. A suddenly enraged parent (father or male elder) may hurl a firebrand at a child, or cuff him roughly about the head and shoulders for as long as the rage lasts. Sometimes real injury results, but there is no planned, coldly calculated punishment, and the anger is usually quickly forgotten. The youngster is never left in doubt when he has transgressed. Retribution comes within a split second. Parents do not hesitate to exercise their authority and to impose their wills, when angered. The youngster soon has a clear conception of what kind of behavior it would be wise to avoid. Thus the youngster is presented, gradually, with a set of values which early become rooted in his personality, and help him to remain, later in life, in tune with his social group and culture pattern.

554

562

Individuals who chafe at the status quo, notably women and/or individuals of either sex who have a talent and urge for individual enterprise, often find their way into the "gar" cult. Cultural participation of the female is so restricted during her life cycle, that many emotional outlets are denied her. Monotonous daily routines of manual labor; two years of breastfeeding after every birth; denial of active participation in the church; derogatory views of female intelligence on the part of the males; etc., limit the Amhara women

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* 665 the morning and what remains to be done. The peasant may retire for a nap,
 512 and perhaps to lie with his wife, before taking up the afternoon's work. He
 462 returns for about three more hours of plowing after his noon rest. The after-
 noon sun burns down on him; the plow is harder to wield; he plods on. At
 home the women continue their work, no sooner finishing one task than they
 attend to another. The mother puts the child who rides on her back to the
 breast whenever it cries.

• [854] The shepherds do not come home for lunch. They have taken some *injarā*
 * 565 or *dābo* ("whole wheat bread") along with them. In harvest months they
 512 enjoy a special treat, roasting grains or pulse which they have snatched from
 233 somebody's field. Though their responsibility is great—a boy will be whipped
 857 if an animal in his charge gets hurt or lost or if it gets into fields of grain—
 [262] their work is light. They spend the day running idly, practicing war chants,
 playing at various adult activities. Their mood is as free as the great spaces
 about them. As the day grows hotter they are likely to discard their sheepskin
 [291] covering and move about naked. Toward dusk, the shepherds' spirits quicken.
 Their songs become more excited; lively melodies are heard from their
 wooden flutes. It is time to go home to family, supper, and fire.

* 565 When father and sons enter after the day's work, they start munching on
 512 roasted grains, *injarā*, or *dābo*. They may drink some *tallā* and relax. It begins
 to get chilly. The room is dark and smoky, the fleas bite them—but it is the
 easiest time of the day. The family is together, and everyone enjoys talking
 and hearing about the homely events of the day. A few hours after dark, sup-
 [264] per is served. Parents and older children eat together out of a common basket.
 Younger children and servants stand respectfully, awaiting their turn, grate-
 ful if someone places a large bite of food in their mouths.

[515] After dinner there is a great washing of feet—the father's by his wife or
 782 children, the others' by themselves. The peasant recites or reads his evening
 513 prayers and lies down on his bed made of strips of cowhide. The children
 352 settle for the night on the clay benches. Last of all, the mother covers the em-
 bers with ashes, sets out the grain she must grind before dawn, and places her
 weary body next to that of her husband's.

* 565 This grueling schedule is not repeated every day. On nearly half the days in
 512 each month heavy labor is not permitted—men may not plow or harvest,
 527 women may not grind or spin. These are holy days: Saturdays and Sundays
 (both of which are honored as the Sabbath in Abyssinia) and the monthly
 and annual commemorations of the saints.

* 565 The woman's schedule on such days is only lightened, not radically altered.
 512 Food and drink must still be prepared and served. Except for a possible trip to
 527 church with her husband Sunday morning before breakfast, a woman's hours
 462 are still confined to the home compound and its obligations. The shepherds
 [524] must still take care of their herds, though some boys may get together for

THE PHENOMENA OF AMHARA ORALITY

155 Shortly after an Amhara child is born some butter is placed in his mouth. This
 826 is done in the belief that it will keep his voice from becoming harsh. From
 [856] that moment on, the mouth never ceases to be an organ of extraordinary
 [192] importance in his life. Its cultural importance is reflected in the attention
 given to it in the Amharic vocabulary: Baeteman's *Dictionnaire Amarigna-Français* lists some sixty idioms built with the Amharic word for mouth, *af*,
 more than are listed for any other words in the language except "eye,"
 [639] "heart," and "earth."⁴ The organ is publicly celebrated in such proverbs as:
 "Cleverness of mouth, to the master; cleverness of hand, to the slave."

155 The oral zone is of course of universal significance. Some items of oral
 826 imagery probably appear in most languages, and manifestations of oral libido
 171 appear in many forms familiar to Westerners: the French love for gourmand-
 ism, the German passion for beer-drinking and singing, the American addic-
 tion to cigarettes, chewing gum, and "life-savers." Many of the less familiar
 phenomena to be related below in describing Amhara orality, moreover, are
 found in most of the cultures of Africa and the Middle East. But such
 phenomena often appear inconspicuously alongside other culturally patterned
 impulses and sublimations stemming from other phases of psychosexual de-
 velopment. What may distinguish the Amhara—and doubtless some other
 cultures—is the extent to which the oral zone is an object of attention and a
 source of behavioral modes and expressive symbolism. The Amhara, it ap-
 pears, have a preoccupation with orality.

121 This preoccupation is manifest in three different kinds of phenomena.

155 There are, first of all, aspects of Amhara culture which express a strong posi-
 tive attachment to the infantile experience of sucking, in pure and in nu-
 merous sublimated forms. These we shall designate as the phenomena of
oral erotism. Second, there are the aspects of Amhara culture which express a
 [152] strong positive attachment to the oral zone as a center for various aggressive
 activities—the modes which Erikson calls "incorporation by biting," "oral
 retention," and "oral intrusion." These we shall collectively designate as the
 phenomena of *oral sadism*. Finally, there are phenomena which express a con-
 flict about the gratification of many of these oral desires; and these we shall
 refer to as the phenomena of *oral ambivalence*.

155 *Oral Erotism*

- 853 Feeding at the breast is a prominent and beloved experience in Amhara life. The Amhara infant is suckled whenever he wishes, at the slightest show of desire. Since he is rarely separated from his mother it is easy for him to satisfy himself at any time of day or night. Popular beliefs about breast-feed-

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ing support this permissiveness. If a baby is not suckled whenever he wishes to be, it is believed that he will become sick or will not grow strong, and the negligent mother is looked on as one of evil character. 155 853

Not only is the infant's desire to suck freely indulged, but it is indulged for a fairly long time. The normal period for breast-feeding is two to three years. Only if a new sibling happens on the scene is weaning deliberately effected. If another child is not forthcoming, and the mother is not ill, there is no inclination at any time to deny the child the breast. In many cases nursing continues until the child is four or five, when his work obligations begin to interfere. 853 862 155

The attitude of oral permissiveness is manifest in other ways. Thumb-sucking is accepted with good humor, and when a baby is in a bad mood he may be given his father's or mother's thumb to use as a pacifier. Though Amhara are otherwise very modest, mothers do not hesitate to offer the breast no matter where they happen to be. When referring to the process of breast-feeding, Amhara males invariably cup one hand under an imaginary breast to depict this common and natural event. When speaking to persuade a guest to accept a second glass of beer, the Amhara host has recourse to the formula: "But your mother's breasts are two!" Another indication that breast-feeding is a very familiar part of the Amhara's social environment is that in interpreting the TAT cards, a number of respondents interpreted some scene with children as a situation of breast-feeding, although this was not depicted on any of the cards. 853 854 155 856 [125]

The emotional context of breast-feeding is more significant than the physical pleasures involved. Until he leaves the breast the Amhara child inhabits an emotional paradise. He receives much attention and is fondled by both parents and by other relatives. He remains close to his mother at all times, sleeping alongside her at night and spending the day near her when not tied in a bundle on her back. He accompanies her thus to visit relatives, attend market, or go to church. Only when the mother goes to fetch water is he separated from her, for there is not room for both baby and water jug on the mother's back, and besides, water holes are the abodes of evil spirits who may try to make the child sick. [753] [756]

After he is weaned, the Amhara child enters a much harsher emotional atmosphere. He must adjust to a regime of commands, responsibilities, and punishments. He is nostalgic forever after for the warmth and security of his earliest years, a condition vividly associated with the experience of sucking at the breast. The prominence in Amhara culture of this association of emotional security with breast-feeding is shown by such phenomena as the mammary symbolism of the rooftop and the institution known as the "breast-father." The former consists of a clay ornament, whose color and shape clearly replicate the female nipple, which is placed atop the breast-like conical roof which 155 855 853 853 152 155 831

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- 853 covers the Amhara home.* The latter is related to customs concerning
155 adoption.
152
831 The adoption of children among traditional Amhara takes place through
597 a ritual in which the child sucks the honey-dipped thumb of his intended
853 foster parent. The latter thereby becomes the child's *ṭuṭ abbāt*, or breast-
155 father. In some cases the child actually sucks the nipples of the *ṭuṭ abbāt*. Used
152 metaphorically, the image of sucking someone's breast is employed to indicate becoming close to, or ingratiating oneself with, a superior; breast-feeding is so explicitly connected with emotional security that people are inclined to allude to it when finding a new source of security.
- 157 The Amhara's attachment to passive, pleasurable activities centering on the
155 oral zone appears in a wide variety of forms. Manipulation of the lips is one of these. Amhara often stand about fingering their lips or rubbing them against some object, much as people in another culture might scratch their
[855] heads or stroke their chins. Children may be humored by having their lips played with by a relative. The frequent covering and uncovering of the mouth with a part of the toga, that is so characteristic of the Amhara, may be a sublimated form of this.
- 155 The lips are used in Amhara culture for a variety of expressive purposes.
201 The Amhara identify persons and places, not by pointing with the finger or
[832] hand, but by distending the lips in a certain direction. Kissing, while seldom used for romantic purposes, serves a number of other expressive functions.
- 576 Relatives or friends of either sex kiss each other on both cheeks after a long
155 separation, the older or superior in status kissing first. Children and servants greet their superiors by kissing their feet, which they also do to show gratitude for some favor. One kisses one's own hands before extending them to
[431] receive a gift. Kissing one's fingers is done to signify an oath or a special appreciation of something, the meaning being "I swear by it."
- 782 Religious sentiment is typically expressed through kissing. The devout
155 Amhara kisses his fingers and touches the table to show thanksgiving after a meal. The church is greeted by kissing a part of the building, and going to church is referred to as "kissing the church." Following devotional services the priest's cross is kissed by all present, and often the Holy Book is kissed as well. When the ark is brought outside on holidays, reverence is shown by falling to the ground and kissing the earth.
- 155 While, moreover, romantic kissing is an uncommon activity among the
538 Amhara, Amharic literature at times represents this activity with poignant
832 intensity. Thus, in an unwritten Amharic couplet one hears:

[184] *The Gurage, by contrast, place a straight stick atop their homes. So do the Amhara of Gojjam Province.

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155 cannibal with eyes in the back of his head. (The specter of the *chirdā* is some-
152 times evoked in order to frighten children into behaving properly.) Still an-
176 other figure is the *salābi*, a person who is imagined capable of spiriting away
178 a man's harvested grain by means of magic incantations.

121 Without delving into questions on the cultural origins and social functions
155 of oral ambivalence among the Amhara, one can understand how it comes
into being in the individual by looking at what happens during childhood in
Amhara society. It is true that, if one abides by the hypothesis on this
subject supported by Whiting and Child's cross-cultural study, the phe-
nomenon remains puzzling. Their theory attributes a high degree of anxiety
about oral gratification to a low level of indulgence of oral gratification in
early childhood and a high level of frustration during weaning. This partic-
ular hypothesis is not consistent with the data on the Amhara. As we noted
• (853) earlier in this chapter, oral gratification is indulged among infants to a very
high degree by Amhara mothers. There is considerable variation in Amhara
121 practice with regard to weaning, moreover. At times the advent of a new
155 baby or a mother's sickness may require abrupt weaning, in which case a
862 bitter substance is put on the mother's nipple to discourage the infant. In
many cases, on the other hand, weaning occurs so gently and spontaneously
that little or no frustration is involved for the infant. The relative frequency
of these two procedures is a question for which adequate data have not
been assembled, but the norm seems to be a gradual departure from the
breast, after the child has been happily adjusted to eating other food for more
than a year.

121 Even if the Amhara child is not frustrated by too little indulgence of suck-
155 ing and too severe weaning, he is nonetheless deprived in two other respects
146 as he emerges from infancy. One is nutritional. Medical studies of Abyssinian
children suggest a dietary deficiency beginning in the second half of the first
year, and persisting throughout early childhood.²¹ It is possible that this
relative decline in biological well-being contributes to a sense of deprivation
toward the end of the breast-feeding period.

121 The emotional situation of the child after weaning presents a more visible
155 area of frustration. Amhara childhood is marked by a fairly sharp discon-
858 tinuity. This may be illustrated by the fact that many Amhara boys are
nurslings at the age of three and shepherds at five. The narcissism which has
flowered during the nursing stage is dealt a series of blows as the young
child becomes subject to the responsibilities, punishments, and suppressed
status which are the lot of Amhara children. According to contemporary psy-
choanalytic theory, this sort of change in emotional support has far more
significance for the development of behavioral tendencies than the mechanics
of the weaning process; and what psychoanalysts have posited as a possible